Mapping Different Culturally Oriented Texts over EFL Learners' Reading Indices via Project-Based Learning*

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Abstract

The present article made attempts to examine the implementation of diverse culturally-loaded materials among some EFL university students to see their impact on foreign language reading anxiety, reading comprehension self-efficacy and reading proficiency of the learners via two constructed teaching schemes that were labeled project- and teacher-based teaching methods. The investigation was conducted with four classes of freshmen majoring in English Language Teaching, each focusing on different culturally oriented materials (i.e., L1 culture for project based class A, L2 culture for project based class B, and L1 and L2 cultures for project- and teacher-based classes C and D). Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance subscale, Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale, and the reading section of the Michigan Test were applied as pre-tests and post-tests in this study. Paired samples t-tests and ANCOVA were utilized for analyzing the data. The findings showed that despite considerable decreases observed in reading anxiety levels towards the end of the treatment in classes A, C, and D, significant improvement was actually evident in the L2 culturally oriented class. Moreover, though in classes A, B, and C, significant improvements were observed regarding reading self-efficacy and reading proficiency from pretest to posttest, no differences regarding the two variables were observed among the classes. Meanwhile, class C outperformed class D with respect to the two aforementioned variables. The results could carry certain implications for EFL material developers, teachers, curriculum and syllabus designers, among others, with respect to the choice of learning materials and teaching methodologies.

Introduction

By far, within English as a Foreign Language context (EFL), reading comprehension has been one of the key skills. 'Reading', by nature, connotes the capability to read, process, and grasp the meaning of texts, which is influenced by a myriad of interfering factors such as levels of proficiency, reading strategies as well as teachers' methodology among many others (Mangubhai, 1990). Quite recently, some crucial factors including 'reading self-efficacy' and 'reading anxiety' have become associated with reading comprehension (Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000). The term 'reading self-efficacy' denotes students' beliefs and confidence in their own abilities in reading, which might supposedly affect their performance. In this manner, if they do not gain favorable scores in reading, this might bring about 'reading anxiety' to the detriment of those who suffer from lower 'self-efficacy' grades. On the other hand, as mentioned by Bandura in his Social Cognitive Theory (1986, 1997), students' physiological state can be regarded as one of the main elements influencing their self-efficacy beliefs. In order to help students gain higher levels of self-efficacy, their stress, pain, fatigue, and emotional arousals must be lowered; otherwise, as Bandura (1988), Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), and Prat-Sala and Redford (2012) state, these factors may lead to low self-efficacy and, consequently, weak performance in learners.

With regard to reading skills in EFL contexts, Saito et al. (1999) discovered two sources for 'foreign language reading anxiety', defined by Zbornik and Wallbrown (1991) and Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) as the kind of stress and nervousness usually experienced in the reading process, including a) unfamiliar scripts and writing system, and b) unfamiliar cultural material. As to this second factor i.e., unfamiliar cultural contents/materials, it is alleged that those texts that are more distant and deviant from the readers' cultural norms will lead to less comprehension and, inevitably, more anxiety in the process of reading. Hereby, some scholars have thought over introducing learners' first culture (L1 culture) into EFL textbooks and curricula (Al-Shboul, Sheikh Ahmad, Sahari Nordin, & Abdul Rahman, 2013; Carrell, 1988;

Ketchum, 2006; Saito et al., 1999; Zhang & Kim, 2014; Zhao, Guo, & Dynia, 2013).

Accordingly, to reduce anxiety within Iranian learners, the researchers in the present study aimed to introduce culture un/familiarity via "Project-based learning" as the methodological framework proposed by Lier (2007). Here, modeling is acted out through group works, which involve cooperative fulfilling of a series of activities aimed at common goals, such as presenting a paper in a group. As Lier (2007) comments, due to the fact that in project-based learning (PBL) learners are involved in cooperative pursuits, they are provided with chances to gain new information and skills through observing their classmates in action and to elevate their beliefs in their own capabilities regarding language areas, a fact that may, as a result, lead to lowered levels of language anxiety (Meyer, 1997; Schunk, 2012).

Literature Review

Culture Learning

Integration of culture within second or foreign language learning curricula has long been exercised by many scholars in the English language Teaching (ELT) domains (Brown, 2007; Choudhury, 2014; Christiansen & Silva, 2016; Schulz, 2007; Tomalin, 2008; Wang, 2008). In line, one of the top most motives for foreign language teaching has been enriching intercultural communicative competence in EFL students, which is the ability to interact effectively and efficiently with native speakers of another culture and language (Gulbinskienė & Lasauskienė, 2014). As mentioned by Mounford and Wadham-Smith (2000), this communicative capability is incomplete without cultural awareness (as cited in Saluveer, 2004), which is explained as the information gained about both the other culture and one's own culture (Serna Dimas, 2016). In fact, this awareness encompasses the capacity to get information about one's own cultural stance by reflecting on one's own cultural identity, and compromise a distinction between the two cultures i.e., one's own and the target cultures.

As Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (1999) state, "no longer thought to be value-neutral, textbooks and other materials used in language learning generally present a certain way of looking at the world, that is, through the cultural lens of the author" (p. 39). Therefore, international EFL textbooks are also deemed as reflecting L2 writers' points of views and cultures (Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2015) without any consideration of non-native speakers and local cultures at all (Seidhofer, 2005). However, as Cortazzi and Jin (1999) admit, nowadays, EFL and ESP textbooks have hardly included diverse inter-cultural topics and texts. Using such contents, on the other hand, can elevate students' intercultural awareness and pave the way towards efficient communication between and among interlocutors (Ashraf, Motallebzadeh, & Kafi, 2013; Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2015). Consequently, it is now recommended that teachers find 'alternatives' for the current so-called standard or global textbooks (mainly rooted in second language culture) which can be achieved by customizing the textbooks, using glocal or localized resources, and replacing textbooks with content-based approaches to teaching and learning.

The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Successful reading understanding has frequently been associated with squeezing L1 cultural elements into EFL contents and learning situations (Carrell, 1988; Ketchum, 2006) as endorsed by Schuman's Schema Theory. As stated by Al-Issa (2006) and Brown (2001), schemata are, in fact, the background or previously acquired information, beliefs, feelings, experiences, rules, and the like that readers bring with themselves to a reading passage. In general, schema or schemata can be classified into three main kinds. As to reading comprehension, they might include formal or textual, content and cultural schemata. Meanwhile, "Cultural schema" is associated with the cultural background information which a reader needs in order to be able to understand a passage and the hidden meanings and intentions of its author. This can be facilitated if the total set of beliefs, behaviors, rituals, attitudes, etc. is shared between the reader and the writer by

being a member of a specific group or society (Ketchum, 2006). Reconstruction of the author's intended message(s) through predicting would be hitherto easier (Klapproth, 2004, cited in Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2013; Kramsch, 1998).

According to Ketchum (2006), when students confront a reading passage concentrated on a new culture and content, their reading comprehension capability will be weakened. It is thought that in such a situation, in order to comprehend the text, learners have to bear both micro (pattern recognition or letter identification) and macro (monitoring comprehension and activation of prior knowledge) levels of textual analysis; then, they have to exert high levels of attention, cognitive processing , and working memory space (Brantmeier, 2004). On the other hand, if they are familiar with the content and embedded cultural information in the text, their reading practice would demand less cognitive processing due to the fact that the relevant content and cultural schema have been brought to the reading task and, as a result, macro-level textual analysis will be achieved automatically. This would, in turn, lead to higher achievements and self-efficacy levels within the reader and, consequently, less anxiety in reading comprehension (Carrell, 1988), the fact that recommends integration of L1 culturally known themes and contexts into EFL settings (Erten & Razi, 2009; Jalilifar & Assi, 2008; Rashidi & Soureshjani, 2011). As Davoudi and Ramezani (2014) note, culturally familiar texts or "localized literature" are "literary texts that depict aspects of the readers' culture such as way of life, way of dressing, food, artifacts and others, which are unique to the readers' culture and are familiar to them" (p. 60).

Project-Based Learning (PBL), Culture Teaching and Reading Comprehension Skill
In "Problem-or Project-oriented approach" (Dema & Moeller, 2012), students are gradually become stimulated towards obtaining a deeper understanding of the second or foreign culture through self-directed investigations. Here, students' activities are directed towards both target and source cultures.

Additionally, in the process of executing various stages of project-based learning which consists of 'purposing, planning, executing, and judging' (Foshay, 1999) or 'planning, researching, writing the first draft, and rewriting' (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005), learners can observe and learn from their peers' fruitful decision makings, problem-solving approaches, coping strategies, and evaluative criteria (Blank, 1997; Lier, 2007). Many researchers argue that within PBL, observational learning or modeling is fortified, self-regulated and self-efficacious learning is also engendered. In so doing, students are full of life and active in their self-observation and self-evaluation. Also, they are quite effective in goal setting, crafty in preparing the required plan(s) for accomplishing those goals and also turn into efficacious deciders for satisfying their needs (English & Kitsantas, 2013; Paris & Paris, 2001; Schaffer, Chen, Zhu, & Oakes, 2012; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zimmerman, 2000). On the other hand, elevated degrees of self-efficacy can, sequentially, lead to drops in anxiety levels, the fact which is equated with gaining improved achievements in individuals (Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011).

In addition, in PBL, seeking knowledge from other disciplines as different sources for learning is additionally required by learners, as Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson, and Coulson (1991) claimed. In ELT situations of use, such practices become more critical:

During the inquiry process that learners go through developing solutions, they need to use language to obtain and communicate information, express opinions, and negotiate, as they would in occupational domains. As they document discussions and decisions, consult reference materials, talk to others, or present findings, they learn to listen, speak, read, and write effectively (Abdullah, 1998, p. 3).

As many researchers have asserted, PBL then equates with constructive gains for the students in that their reading comprehension abilities are enhanced (Chu, Tse, Loh, & Chow, 2011; Kavlu, 2015; Othman & Ahmad Shah, 2013; Soleimani, Rahimi, & Sadeghi, 2015).

However, in contrast to project-based instruction, as proposed by Boaler (1997), traditional modes of instruction, are mostly teacher- or lecture- based with a didactic format and context; they are strictly tied to pre-specified textbooks and based on the application of traditional tests as assessment tools. In the traditional mode of teaching, teachers are dictators and agents of change with no chance given to students to have a voice and exercise their own ways of thinking and feeling. Consequently, there remains no space for learners to pace their own learning; it is teachers who are responsible for their learning and transmit knowledge to them. This is the fact that can lead to a boring class with a focus on surface learning, memorizing and rote learning (mostly of rules) instead of an exciting, dynamic, thought-provoking and student-centered class which is the case in project-based instruction (Boaler, 1997). In project-based mode of teaching conceptual, intentional and problem-based learning, learning in context and deep group learning, content understanding, and knowledge construction by group members are encouraged which can all be applied to real-life authentic situations and challenges.

Purpose of the Study

The researchers in the present study represented their attempts over critical issues related to cultural familiarity through a social framework termed as project-based learning and considered its influence on some reading variables within EFL settings. Aims were followed especially on a major plane to clarify to what extent different culturally oriented materials could play a role in English reading classes with project-based learning and to see if there are any effects on students' foreign language reading anxiety, reading comprehension self-efficacy as well as reading proficiency. To this purpose, the following research questions were proposed:

1. Is there any significant difference among the three project-based classes, i.e., L1 culturally oriented group (L1 G), L2 culturally oriented group (L2 G) and L1+L2 culturally oriented group (L1+L2 G), with respect to their foreign language reading anxiety?

2. Is there any significant difference between the L1+L2 project-based experimental group (L1+L2 G) and L1+L2 teacher-based comparison group (CG) with respect to their foreign language reading anxiety?

3. Is there any significant difference among L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G with respect to their reading comprehension self-efficacy beliefs?

4. Is there any significant difference between L1+L2 G and CG with respect to their reading comprehension self-efficacy beliefs?

5. Is there any significant difference among L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G with respect to their reading proficiency?

6. Is there any significant difference between L1+L2 G and CG with respect to their reading proficiency?

Method

Participants

Initially, four classes of freshmen students (both male and female) at BA level were selected through convenient sampling from English Language Teaching department at Binaloud University, Mashhad, a large city in the northeast of Iran. Each class encompassed 35 to 40 individuals. The age range of the sampled students was between 18 and 22 years.

Instrumentation

In line with the purposes of this research, three instruments were used:

1) *Michigan English Test (MET):* For upper beginner to lower advanced levels. In this study, the internal consistencies for the Michigan Test and its reading section were calculated as respectively 0.91 (Cronbach's alpha, n = 101) and 0.70 (Cronbach's alpha, n = 93).

2) *The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS):* For assessing students' level of anxiety in reading comprehension skill. This questionnaire was originally developed by Saito et al. (1999). FLRAS has 20 items in a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). In this study, it possessed

an acceptable internal consistency of 0.77 (Cronbach's alpha) among ninety three students.

3) *Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance Subscale (SLPS):* In order to assess students' reading comprehension self-efficacy, Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance (SLP) subscale from the English version of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) for College Students (developed by Pintrich et al., 1991) was selected for this study. The eight items included in this subscale are rated by a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 7 points (very true of me) to 1 point (not at all true of me). In this study, SLP showed an acceptable internal consistency coefficient of .92 (Cronbach's alpha, n =93).

Procedure

The following procedures were carried out in line with the aims of the present study:

Firstly, the Michigan test was applied at the beginning of the first reading course to the students of four reading classes through which the homogeneous participants were selected as the true participants of the study. Next, three classes were randomly assigned to three consecutive experimental groups and one class was apportioned as the comparison group as well to which the FLRA and SLP questionnaires were administered as pretests (the participants' scores on the reading section of the previously administered Michigan Test were considered as their pre-test scores representing their levels of reading proficiency). All the participants of this study had to pass two reading comprehension courses in two successive terms as obligatory courses of their major at university. Each reading course was held for 15 weeks (two ninety-minute sessions each week).

In order to run PBL, which is mostly based on group collaborations, the selected participants in each three classes were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions (i.e., L1 G, L2 G, and L1+L2 G); in this way, each class was divided into ten distinct groups. In each reading course, these groups were required to carry out their term projects in the

form of orally teaching two reading texts to their classmates in front of class. In this way, by the end of the second term all the three experimental groups had delivered four reading projects in their classes.

Material Preparation:

-For the purpose of determining a suitable level of difficulty for the passages that were supposed to be given to students in the first term, in the pilot study, as conducted by the first researcher among a group of 30 pupils similar to the main participants of the actual study, various passages with different levels of linguistic difficulty (based on Flesch readability levels, 1984) were selected and given to the target students. Afterwards, their remarks and comments on the appropriateness of those texts to their levels of proficiency were collected. Based on the students' views, the "fairly difficult" readability level (Flesch Reading Ease Score of 50-59) was selected as suitable for the first reading course.

-The level of difficulty for the passages chosen for the next reading course was decided to be at the difficult readability level (Flesch Reading Ease Score of 30-49) since students' language proficiency had the possibility to increase between the experimental stages.

- Through regionalizing different online and library culturally-based data bases and sources, in all the treatment groups and based on an in-depth review of the existing literature such as Brooks (1986), Chastain, (1988), Hasselgreen (2003), etc., the first researcher picked out different reading texts related to some topics accessible in all cultures (e.g. food; ceremony). In this way, the teacher, considering the number of individual groups in each experimental class, selected ten reading texts based on L1 culture for L1 G, ten reading passages based on L2 culture for L2 G, and ten other texts (five reading passages based on L1 culture and five others based on L2 culture) for L1+L2 G. For the first reading course, the texts with "fairly difficult" readability level were chosen and for the second course, "difficult" readability level was assigned. For each reading text, diverse exercises including true-false, multiple choice, completion, etc. were also designed.

In the beginning sessions of each reading course in L1 and L2 groups, from among the ten texts prepared by the teacher one passage was randomly assigned to each group of students as their first presentation in class. Then, students in each group were asked to introduce their second project (a reading passage with the same readability level as the first reading passage) with a topic similar to the first assigned one's, together with their own designed exercises.

In the third experimental class, students were also requested to teach two reading texts in each semester; one presentation was supposed to be focused on L1 culture and the other one concentrated on L2 culture. At the commence of each reading course, 10 reading passages (including five L1 culturally oriented texts and five L2 culturally-based reading passages (all prepared by the teacher) were randomly assigned to the ten class groups by the teacher. In this way, at the end of each reading course in each experimental class, ten teacher-prepared texts and ten student-prepared passages were taught in each experimental class by the students themselves.

In the beginning stages of instruction, project-based learning style and the related procedures were provided by the teacher for the target students in order to familiarize them with diverse skills and practices that are common in this kind of learning such as familiarity with library sources, search engines and data bases. Also, inherent constituents associated with student-made projects, including 'reading warm up', 'vocabulary', 'reading skill', etc., were introduced to the learners. Twenty five and thirty five out of one hundred points were allocated grades for the sections involved in the first and second presentations. In the first demonstration, reading tasks were based on teacher's prescribed assignments and the second one was to be prepared by the students themselves. Additionally, she helped the students to develop effective time management skills and encouraged them to participate in English group discussions in class.

Each session before students' participation in group-discussions, they were required to plan their projects through collaborative practices to gather essential information on their topics of interest. Then, in class

time period, they were asked to report back (in English) their attempts in gathering the information and all the preparation tasks they had gone through in order to compile the project. Meanwhile, the teacher had the responsibility to provide her students with the essential consultation (e.g., assuring the fair sharing of responsibilities among group members, checking the suitability of the accumulated information, etc.).

After the presentations, the teacher accompanied with all the students in class discussed various aspects of each instruction; in this way, she received some feedback from the students over the weaknesses and strengths of the projects and allocated a total score for the overall quality of the project to all three members of the group. Generally, during and after the presentation of each group, all the students in class enjoyed the opportunity to observe their friends in action and learn from their weaknesses and strengths (besides their owns).

A teacher-designed achievement test was given to each experimental class to examine the degree of mastery in each class. The exam, enjoying the same layout for the three groups but having different content in terms of cultural orientation, encompassed various sections all being essay type items. The total score of this test (40 points) in addition to the overall grades assigned to the two group presentations (60 points) made up of a sum of 100 points. Each student's grade was eventually converted to a scale of 0-20.

As was stated before, from the four selected classes of students one class was considered as the comparison group. The reading materials that were taught in the comparison class were exactly the same as those presented in the experimental L1+L2 culturally oriented project-based class (L1+L2 G) except for the fact that the comparison class was taught by the researcher herself in a lecture-based way with no project assigned to the students at all. Also, the same teacher-made achievement tests (similar to the ones administered to L1+L2 G) each with the total grade of 40 points were given to students at the end of each term in order to assess their reading achievement. In this way, each term every student's grade was eventually converted to a scale of 0-20 via dividing it by 2.

Finally, FLRAS, SLPS, and the reading section of the Michigan Test were re-administered at the end of the second reading course in all the four classes of the study as post-tests to enable the researcher to probe the probable differences between the results of the pre-tests and post-tests and to investigate the existence of any significant difference among the three experimental classes and between the L1+ L2 culturally oriented project- and teacher-based classes with respect to the variables under question.

Results

In order to gain a better understanding of the real status and achievement of each group of the study and to see whether there has been any significant improvement in each class with respect to the three variables under question (i.e., foreign language reading anxiety, reading comprehension self-efficacy and reading proficiency), paired samples t-tests were run in each group. Then, ANCOVA (sometimes accompanied by its post hoc test) was applied to figure out the significant differences that may exist between or among the study groups. For sure, before carrying out ANCOVA, preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that no violation of the assumptions of linearity, homogeneity of variances and homogeneity of regression slopes existed.

Paired Samples T-Tests for Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA)

Table 1. Paired Samples T-Test for FLRA in L1 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Anxiety Pre-post	4.233	11.276	.023-8.444	2.056	29	.049

As represented in Table1, there was a statistically significant decrease in FLRA scores in L1 G (i.e., L1 culturally oriented project based class) from pre-test to post-test, *t (29)= 2.056, p < .05*. The mean decrease in FLRA scores was 4.233 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .023 to 8.444.

Table 2. Paired Samples T-Test for FLRA in L2 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Anxiety Pre-post	-3.594	9.175	-6.902--.286	-2.216	31	

As indicated in Table 2, a statistically significant increase was figured out in FLRA scores in L2 G (i.e., L2 culturally oriented project based class) from Time 1 (pre-test) to Time 2 (post-test), *t (31)=-2.216, p < .05*. The mean increase in FLRA scores was -3.594 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -6.902 to -.286.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-Test for FLRA in L1+ L2 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R.Anxiety Pre-post	5.677	7.543	2.911-8.444	4.191	30	.000

As shown in Table 3, a statistically significant lowering in FLRA scores was discovered in L1+L2 G (i.e., L1+L2 culturally oriented project based class) from pre-test to post-test, *t (30)= 4.191, p < .05*. The mean decrease in FLRA scores was 5.677 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 2.911 to 8.444.

Table 4. Paired Samples T-Test for FLRA in CG

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Anxiety Pre-post	4.133	8.123	1.100-7.166	2.787	29	.009

As illustrated in the above table, there was a statistically significant decrease in FLRA scores in CG (i.e., L1+L2 culturally oriented teacher based class) from pre-test to post-test, *t (29) = 2.787, p < .05*. The mean decrease in FLRA scores was 4.133 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.100 to 7.166.

ANCOVA among L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G Regarding FLRA

For the purpose of investigating the effect of utilizing different culturally oriented materials on reducing participants' foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) in the three experimental classes, a one-way between groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) together with its post hoc test were applied as follows:

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for foreign language reading anxiety as a dependent variable

Group	Mean	SD	N
L1 culturally oriented class	50.13	9.138	30
L2 culturally oriented class	53.66	10.936	32
L1+L2 culturally oriented class	48.13	7.749	31
Total	50.68	9.569	93

Table 6. ANCOVA for the groups' foreign language reading anxiety

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2441.899[a]	3	813.966	12.109	.000	.290
Inrercept	1663.200	1	1663.200	24.743	.000	.218

R. Anxiety pre	1947.746	1	1947.746	28.976	.000	.246
Group	906.426	2	453.213	6.742	.002	.123
Error	5982.423	89	67.218			
Total	247267.000	93				
Corrected Total	8424.323	92				

a. R squared = .290 (adjusted r squared = .266)

As represented in Tables 5 and 6, after adjusting for pre-intervention scores on the FLRA test, there was a significant difference among the three study groups in post-intervention scores on this test, *F (6.742) = .002, p<.05, partial eta squared = .132 (*There was also a strong relationship between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on the FLRA test, as indicated by a partial eta squared value of .246 (p<.05), making the pre-intervention an appropriate covariate for the model). However, in order to determine the exact location of the discrepancy and to specify which class or classes did achieve significant improvement over others, ANCOVA post hoc test was run, the results of which come next:

Table 7. ANCOVA post hoc test for the groups' foreign language reading anxiety

group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig
L1 culturally oriented class	L2 culturally oriented class	-5.655	.027
	L1+L2 culturally oriented class	1.727	1.000
L2 culturally oriented class	L1 culturally oriented class	5.655	.027
	L1+L2 culturally oriented class	7.382	.002
L1+L2 culturally oriented class	L1 culturally oriented class	-1.727	1.000
	L2 culturally oriented class	-7.382	.002

As depicted in Table 7, there were significant differences not only between L1 G and L2 G (Mean Difference=-5.655, p<.05), but also

between L1+L2 G and L2 G (Mean Difference= -7.382, p<.05) regarding their levels of FLRA. With the help of this Table and based on the results obtained from the paired samples t-tests (Tables 1 to 3), it can be inferred that the type of reading materials used in L2 G has been less effective than the reading materials applied in L1 G and L1+L2 G in lowering students' FLRA levels. Besides, L2 G reading passages have been more influential in enhancing FLRA in students than lowering it, which is the case for the texts applied in L1 G and L1+L2 G. This implies the rejection of the first null hypothesis.

ANCOVA between L1+L2 G and CG Regarding FLRA

In order to examine the influence of using different instructional methods, i.e., project based and teacher based, on lowering students' foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) levels in L1+L2 G and CG, another one-way between groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was run. The results are as follows:

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for foreign language reading anxiety as a dependent variable

Group	Mean	SD	N
L1+L2 culturally oriented project based class	48.13	7.749	31
L1+L2 culturally oriented teacher based class	49.87	8.733	30
Total	48.98	8.225	61

Table 9. ANCOVA for the groups' foreign language reading anxiety

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	1278.981[a]	2	639.491	13.342	.000	.315
Intercept	523.936	1	523.936	10.931	.002	.159
R. Anxiety pre	1232.948	1	1232.948	25.723	.000	.307
Group	40.581	1	40.581	.847	.361	.014
Error	2780.003	58	47.931			
Total	150422.000	61				

Corrected Total	4058.984	60	

a. R squared = .315 (adjusted r squared = .291)

As illustrated in Tables 8 and 9, no significant discrepancy between L1+L2 G and CG in post-intervention scores was figured out on the FLRA test, *F (.847) = .361, p>.05, partial eta squared = .014.* According to the previous two Tables and through resorting to the results of the related paired samples t-tests (Tables 3 and 4), it can be deduced that the type of instructional method used in L1+L2 G, i.e., project-based learning, has been as successful as the one applied in CG, i.e., teacher-based learning, in decreasing students' FLRA levels. This necessitates the acceptance of the second null hypothesis delivered in this investigation.

Paired Samples T-Tests for Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance (SLP)

Table 10. Paired Samples T-Test for SLP in L1 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Self-efficacy pre-post	-2.633	6.333	-4.998--.269	-2.278	29	.030

As represented in Table 10, a significant elevation was found in SLP scores in L1 G from Time 1 to Time 2, *t (29) = -2.278, p < .05.* The mean increase in SLP scores was -2.633 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.998 to -.269.

Table 11. Paired Samples T-Test for SLP in L2 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Self-efficacy pre-post t	-2.719	5.341	-4.645--.793	-2.879	31	.007

As indicated in Table 11, a statistically significant enhancement in SLP scores in L2 G was discovered from pre-test to post-test, *t (31) = -2.879, p < .05*. The mean increase in SLP scores was -2.719 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.645 to -.793.

Table 12. Paired Samples T-Test for SLP in L1+L2 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Self-efficacy pre-post	-5.097	5.528	-7.124—3.069	-5.134	30	.000

There was a significant growth in SLP scores in L1+L2 G from Time 1 to Time 2, *t (30) = -5.134, p < .05* (as shown in the above table). The mean increase in SLP scores was -5.097 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -7.124 to -3.069.

Table 13. Paired Samples T-Test for SLP in C G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Self-efficacy pre-post	-1.467	5.981	-3.700-.767	-1.343	29	.190

As illustrated in Table 13, no significant change was actually revealed in SLP scores in CG from Time 1 to Time 2, *t (29) = -1.343, p > .05*. The mean increase in SLP scores was -1.467 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -3.700 to .767.

ANCOVA among L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G Regarding SLP
For checking the effect of applying different culturally based reading contents on enhancing participants' self-efficacy for learning and performance (SLP) in the three project based classes, ANCOVA was again conducted the results of which are as follows:

Table14. Descriptive statistics for reading comprehension self-efficacy as a dependent variable

Group	Mean	SD	N
L1 culturally oriented class	34.03	4.796	30
L2 culturally oriented class	33.59	4.420	32
L1+L2 culturally oriented class	32.55	4.567	31
Total	33.39	4.585	93

Table 15. ANCOVA for the groups' reading comprehension self-efficacy

Source	Type III of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	378.774[a]	3	126.258	7.225	.000	.196
Intercept	1870.804	1	1870.804	107.055	.000	.546
R. Self-efficacy pre	343.072	1	343.072	19.632	.000	.181
Group	1.126	2	.563	.032	.968	.001
Error	1555.291	89	17.475			
Total	105601.000	93				
Corrected Total	1934.065	92				

a. R squared = .196 (adjusted r squared = .169)

In spite of improvements of self-efficacy scores in all the three treatment groups from pre-test to post-test, after adjusting for pre-intervention scores on the SLP test, as shown in Tables 14 and 15, there was no significant difference among the groups in post-intervention scores on this test, *F (.032) = .968, p>.05, partial eta squared = .001*. With the help of the previous two Tables and based on the results gained from the related t-test Tables 10 to 12, it can be concluded that the sorts of reading materials used in L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G possess the same level of power in improving students' SLP levels, the fact that implies the acceptance of the third null hypothesis.

ANCOVA between L1+L2 G and CG Regarding SLP

For the purpose of answering the fourth research question and investigating the influence of utilizing different instructional methods, i.e., project based and teacher based, on elevating participants' self-efficacy for learning and performance (SLP) in L1+L2 G and CG, another ANCOVA was applied, the results of which are as follows:

Table16. Descriptive statistics for reading comprehension self-efficacy as a dependent variable

Group	Mean	SD	N
L1+L2 culturally oriented project based class	32.55	4.567	31
L1+L2 culturally oriented teacher based class	27.27	5.152	30
Total	29.95	5.509	61

Table 17. ANCOVA for the groups' reading comprehension self-efficacy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	687.417[a]	2	343.709	17.588	.000	.378
Intercept	1116.035	1	1116.035	57.110	.000	.496
R. Self-efficacy pre	262.109	1	262.109	13.413	.001	.188
Group	327.906	1	327.906	16.780	.000	.224
Error	1133.435	58	19.542			
Total	56541.111	61				
Corrected Total	1820.852	60				
a. R squared = .378 (adjusted r squared = .356)						

As demonstrated in Tables 16 and 17, a significant discrepancy between L1+L2 G and CG was revealed in post-intervention scores on SLP test, *F (16.780) = .000, p<.05, partial eta squared = .224.* According to the results shown in these two tables and the related paired samples t-test Tables 12 and 13, it can be deduced that the type of instructional method used in L1+L2 G, i.e., project-based learning (with the mean score of 32.55), has been more successful in increasing students' SLP levels than the one applied in CG, i.e., teacher-based

learning (with the mean score of 27.27), which actually made no significant change in students' SLP levels. This implies the rejection of the fourth null hypothesis.

Paired Samples T-Tests for Reading Proficiency (RP)

Table 18. Paired Samples T-Test for RP in L1

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Proficiency pre-post	-2.800	2.398	-3.696—1.904	-6.395	29	.000

As represented in Table 18, there was a statistically significant increase in RP scores in L1 G from pre-test to post-test, *t (29) = -6.395, p < .05*. The mean increase in RP scores was -2.800 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -3.696 to -1.904.

Table 19. Paired Samples T-Test for RP in L2 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lowe-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Proficiency pre-post	-3.094	2.532	-4.007—2.181	-6.912	31	.000

As indicated in the preceding table, a statistically significant elevation was figured out in RP scores in L2 G from Time 1 to Time 2*, t (31) = -6.912, p < .05*. The mean increase in RP scores was -3.094 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.007 to -2.181.

Table 20. Paired Samples T-Test for RP in L1+L2 G

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Proficiency	-2.226	1.892	-2.920—1.532	-6.549	30	.000

pre-post

A significant progression in RP scores, as shown in Table 20, in L1+L2 G from pre-test to post-test *(t (30)= -6.549, p < .05)* was discovered. The mean increase in RP scores was -2.226 with a 95% confidence interval ranging -2.920 to -1.532.

Table 21. Paired Samples T-Test for RP in CG

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower-Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
R. Proficiency pre-post	-1.267	1.680	-1.894--.639	-4.129	29	.000

As depicted in the above table, a statistically significant enhancement was found in RP scores in CG from Time 1 to Time 2*, t (29) = -4.129, p < .05*. The mean increase in RP scores was -1.267 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -1.894 to -.639.

ANCOVA among L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G Regarding RP

ANCOVA was again applied in the present research in order to explore whether using various culturally oriented materials can exert any influence on improving students' reading proficiency (RP) in the three experimental classes or not; the results of it are as follows:

Table 22. Descriptive statistics for reading proficiency as a dependent variable

Group	Mean	SD	N
L1 culturally oriented class	7.30	3.505	30
L2 culturally oriented class	7.50	3.203	32
L1+L2 culturally oriented class	6.00	2.683	31
Total	6.94	3.182	93

Table 23. ANCOVA for the groups' reading proficiency

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	472.398[a]	3	157.466	30.518	.000	.507
Intercept	275.807	1	275.807	53.454	.000	.375
R. Proficiency pre	431.085	1	431.085	83.548	.000	.484
Group	15.186	2	7.593	1.472	.235	.032
Error	459.215	89	5.160			
Total	5405.000	93				
Corrected Total	931.613	92				

a. R squared = .507 (adjusted r squared = .490)

Despite the elevations in reading proficiency scores observed in all the three experimental groups from pre-test to post-test, after adjusting for pre-intervention scores on the RP test, as represented in Tables 22 and 23, there was no significant difference among the groups in post-intervention scores on this test, *F (1.472) = .235, p>.05, partial eta squared = .032.* With the help of these Tables and based on the results obtained from the paired samples t-tests (Tables 18 to 20), it can be inferred that the type of reading materials used in L1 G, L2 G and L1+L2 G possess the same level of power in elevating students' RP levels. This implies the acceptance of the fifth null hypothesis.

ANCOVA between L1+L2 G and CG Regarding RP

Since investigating the influence of utilizing various teaching approaches, i.e., project based and teacher based, on increasing participants' reading proficiency levels in L1+L2 G and CG was another concern in this study, another ANCOVA was applied by the researcher. Here are the results:

Table 24. Descriptive statistics for reading proficiency as a dependent variable

Group	Mean	SD	N
L1+L2 culturally oriented project based class	6.00	2.683	31

L1+L2 culturally oriented teacher based class	5.03	2.773	30
Total	5.52	2.748	61

Table 25. ANCOVA for the groups' reading proficiency

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	273.816[a]	2	136.908	44.263	.000	.604
Intercept	101.920	1	101.920	32.951	.000	.362
R. Proficiency pre	259.569	1	259.569	83.920	.000	.591
Group	14.061	1	14.061	4.546	.037	.073
Error	179.397	58	3.093			
Total	2315.000	61				
Corrected Total	453.213	60				
a. R squared = .604 (adjusted r squared = .591)						

As shown in the preceding two tables, a significant discrepancy between L1+L2 G and CG was revealed in post-intervention scores on RP test, *F (4.546) = .037, p<.05, partial eta squared = .073.* Through resorting to the results of these two Tables and the paired samples t-test Tables 20 and 21, it can be concluded that project-based learning in L1+L2 G has been more successful than teacher-based learning in CG in improving students' RP levels, the fact which necessitated the rejection of the sixth null hypothesis.

Discussion

In this study, the researcher made an attempt to examine the influence of using different culturally oriented materials on university students' foreign language reading anxiety, reading comprehension self-efficacy and reading proficiency in project- and teacher-based reading classes. The summary of the results obtained in the study together with its discussion are as follows:

1. Through investigating the status of each group before and after the intended treatment, significant decreases in FLRA levels were observed among the study participants in the L1 culturally loaded project based group (class A), and L1+L2 culturally oriented project- and teacher-based groups (classes C and D), though exactly the opposite result, i.e., significant increase in FLRA levels, was figured out in the experimental class with L2 cultural content (class B).

2. Through conducting ANCOVA analyses it became crystal clear that the unfamiliar cultural content applied in class B was actually reading anxiety provoking for most of the students, compared to L1 or quite familiar and L1+L2 or partially familiar culturally based materials taught in classes A and C in which alleviation of foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) levels (with no significant difference between the two classes) was, in real sense, observed. This finding was in line with some studies including Al-Issa (2006), Al-Shboul et al. (2013), Alderson (2000), Alptekin (2006), Davoudi and Ramezani (2014), Demir (2012), Erten and Razi (2009), Jalilifar and Assi (2008), Ketchum (2006), Liu (2015), Miller (2002), Rashidi and Soureshjani (2011), Saito et al. (1999), Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, and Rezazadeh (2013), Yousef, Karimi, and Janfeshan (2014), Zhang and Kim (2014), and Zhao et al. (2013). Comprehension a second or foreign language would be, then, facilitated in culturally known contexts. This means that when learners are placed in a familiar context for learning, they can relate what they have already learned about their own culture to what they are attempting to understand and learn in English through reading. This will not only make prediction of the content easier by reducing the cognitive burden imposed on the memory system by the complex reading procedures, but would also compensate for other probable deficiencies during the reading process. In this way, students' understanding, motivation, and interest in reading might improve and their levels of reading anxiety will probably be lowered. However, no significant discrepancy between the project based class C and its teacher based counterpart class D was, in fact, identified.

In other words, different teaching methodologies exerted in classes C and D did not considerably influence students' anxiety levels.

3. Considering the study participants' self-efficacy gain scores from pretest to posttest in all the study groups, all the experimental classes, except the comparison one with no change in its self-efficacy scores, demonstrated improved levels of self-efficacy in reading comprehension.

4. Through running ANCOVA analyses, the researcher came to this conclusion that no real or significant difference actually existed among the three experimental groups of the investigation; nevertheless, the L1+L2 culturally oriented project based class C significantly overrode its teacher based counterpart in this regard.

5. Having scrutinized the whole participants' gain scores in the Michigan reading proficiency test after two courses of inquiry, the researcher discovered significant improvements in the reading proficiency of all the study groups.

6. In the light of the gathered data, no significant discrepancy among the three experimental groups was revealed after checking their status with respect to each other; on the contrary, the experimental project based class C outperformed the comparison teacher based class D with this respect.

The reasons behind the significant increase found regarding reading self-efficacy in the three experimental groups might be possibly attributed to two factors, one of which is the observed heightened levels of reading achievement or proficiency (with some proponents such as Bandura, 1988). As far as the fact that a significant improvement in the reading proficiency test scores of the study participants in class D was also observed (with no change in their self-efficacy levels), this factor may not have played an influential role in elevating students' self-efficacy beliefs in reading comprehension. The other factor can be "modeling" (observational learning) as the key element in project-based learning (with Chu et al., 2011; English & Kitsantas, 2013; Kavlu, 2015; Lier, 2007; Meyer, 1997; Othman & Ahmad Shah, 2013; Paris &

Paris, 2001; Schaffer et al., 2012; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Soleimani et al., 2015; Zimmerman, 2000 as some of the main advocates). Such investigators elucidated that in project-based learning classrooms some degree of observational learning or modeling is involved which motivates students to learn from watching their peers through cooperative pursuits, the fact that would lead to higher self-confidence and self-efficacy beliefs in them. This factor, that is considered as a milestone in PBL and which is thought to raise learners' self-efficacy beliefs, was not actually evidenced in the teacher based comparison class D in which students did not experience conducting any projects at all.

Many factors may have also led to the enhancement of the participants' reading proficiency in the experimental groups, one of which being their elevated reading comprehension self-efficacy and learning via group work and modeling as a result of project-based learning (with some proponents like Chu et al., 2011; Kavlu, 2015; Lier, 2007; Othman & Ahmad Shah, 2013; Soleimani et al., 2015). Additionally, as mentioned by Lindsay and Knight (2006), during the process of information seeking and data gathering through reading different texts in project-based learning (PBL), students would have a chance to practice various reading skills and strategies, such as skimming or scanning, to find the main points in the text and also to specify those parts which are related to the topic of investigation. Since in class D such project-based learning was absolutely absent, enhancement of reading proficiency test scores in that class was significantly lower than the one observed in the project based counterpart class C; by the way, such an improvement among class D participants can be simply attributed to their natural attainment and progress after passing two courses of reading comprehension during a period of approximately nine months. The results are in agreement with the ideas expressed by some others (namely, Ader & Erktin, 2010; Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011; Mori, 2002; Naseri & Ghabanchi, 2014; Pajares, 2006; Solheim, 2011; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) who pointed

out that elevated reading self-efficacy beliefs would result in higher reading learning and performance.

Besides, because of the fact that in class B, despite increased levels of anxiety, an outstanding improvement in students' reading proficiency scores (with no significant difference from classes A and C) was evidenced, enhancement of reading proficiency in the other two study groups cannot be attributed to decrease in their stress levels in foreign language reading comprehension. As the results indicate, though in the experimental project based class B, students' anxiety levels were significantly higher than those of the other two experimental groups, this fact had not caused any reduction in students' levels of reading self-efficacy and reading proficiency. So, one could claim that when students' reading self-efficacy is heightened, foreign language reading anxiety would play no crucial roles in their reading achievement. This is the fact that was actually observed in class B, where reading anxiety did not spectacularly affect the participants' reading achievement and proficiency. The current finding was in line with some previous studies including Bandura (1997), Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006). It was also in contrast with the research results of Al-Shboul et al. (2013), Sellers (2000), or Wu (2011) who acknowledged that heightened levels of stress or anxiety would necessarily and directly lead to lower learning and performance. In the second place, the results in this study showed that once students' degrees of reading self-efficacy were increased, their reading comprehension was elevated as well, regardless of how high their levels of reading anxiety were.

Conclusion

In the current study, the researchers made an attempt to design a culturally oriented syllabus based on their students' home culture due to the inefficiency of the accessible and mostly global English language learning textbooks available in the market. Such books, as postulated by the present investigators, could not only lower or remove students' affective factors when learning a foreign language, but would also be incompatible with their needs and interests. Some local materials were also prepared by the researchers to examine the suitability of their texts

for their compliance with students' psychological and non-psychological variables. The present study attempted to map different culturally oriented texts over EFL learners' foreign language reading anxiety, reading comprehension self-efficacy, and reading proficiency via project- and teacher-based learning. Despite the fact that in the L1 culturally loaded project based class A and the L1+L2 culturally oriented project- and teacher-based classes C and D considerable decreases were figured out regarding foreign language reading anxiety levels towards the end of the second course, an opposite result was actually observed in the L2 culturally oriented project based class B. These findings suggested that, firstly, cultural familiarity could potentially be responsible for such changes and proved a reducing influence of culturally familiar reading texts on the Iranian students' foreign language reading anxiety. This can also bear an implication regarding the background cultural knowledge among second language learners, which might also bring ease and comfort to the task of reading by incapacitating their psychological barriers in language learning practices involving a new outlook .Second, different teaching approaches applied in classes C and D proved not to be much effective on anxiety levels.

Additionally, as suggested by the results of the present investigation and regarding the point that English language as an international language does not pertain to any one peculiar culture, it is advised to EFL instructors that, via squeezing local cultural contexts and themes into their classrooms, bring their learners as close as possible to their own morals and belongings. Students, in this way, will find an opportunity to personally see and approach a foreign language and its learning in their own ways, to identify themselves with known topics, characters, and plots, to discuss in English about their own cultural heritage and value system, to obtain full-fledged information about their ideas and understandings regarding the world surrounding them, and to build or even rebuild their own identity through discovering its unique features compared to the one represented by the English language culture. These are all the effective elements which would result not only

in lowered levels of anxiety, but also in improved intercultural competence in both local and international situations. Since today one of the major worries of quite a number of practitioners and policy makers in Iran as an Islamic country with respect to TEFL is assimilation of Iranian students into the foreign culture and, as a result, their alienation from their own identity and culture, involving L1 contexts into ELT syllabus and curriculum would, for sure, seem precious. It is needless to say that though this factor did not drastically change students' reading comprehension self-efficacy and reading proficiency scores in the study groups, it may conspicuously exert its positive effects on other students' variables and accomplishments in further studies.

As it was shown and elucidated before, all classes except the L1+L2 culturally oriented teacher based comparison class D (without any change at all) proved to have gained considerable progress in their self-efficacy beliefs after passing two project based reading courses without any significant difference among them. The discovery was explicated by the project-based learning and modeling experienced in the three experimental classes, but absent in class D. This was the type of learning that was also delivered as the main reason for the lower levels of improvement in reading proficiency test scores observed in class D, compared to its project based counterpart class C. As mentioned previously, regarding reading proficiency variable, though a significant elevation was evidenced in all the four groups of the current investigation at the end of the second term, the L1+L2 culturally loaded project based class C outperformed the comparison class D with this respect. Nevertheless, it seemed as if various culturally oriented materials taught in the four study groups did exert no influence on students' self-efficacy and reading proficiency scores at all.

In fact, PBL was thought to provide not only the teacher but also the learners with a chance to be involved in a sort of autonomous meaningful inquiry learning in which searching, reading, making use of already acquired reading strategies or skills for the sake of processing and comprehending new knowledge and information, and generating a

quality end product cooperatively in groups were the outstanding characteristics and assets. In such kind of learning, students were encouraged to take initiatives and be in charge of their own learning, experienced lots of excitement and fun and were motivated to learn via talking with, asking questions from and observing their classmates and communicating their various points of view, and were enticed to compete with each other in a healthy and friendly setting, all of which led to increased levels of reading self-efficacy conceptions and, consequently, heightened reading proficiency in them.

Despite the fact that implementing PBL in such a country like Iran, in which students have got used to passive, spoon-feeding and lecture-based learning and teachers as transmitters of knowledge, seems to be an impossible endeavor, the current obtained results are worth, at least, being given a thought. Definitely, via promoting a suitable classroom environment full of options and real-life collaborative communications, and through providing learners with the essential help and feedback, EFL teachers can motivate their students to practice PBL in EFL classrooms and obtain the optimal results.

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